



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR INFORMATION SERVICE

UNITED STATES FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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WHOOPING CRANES HEAD FOR NEW YEAR IN NORTH

The departure of the remaining whooping cranes from the Aransas (Texas) National Wildlife Refuge on or shortly before April 27, marks the end of a banner year for the whoopers, the Department of the Interior reports.

As far as is known 32 members of this almost extinct species are heading for the nesting area in Canada's Wood Buffalo Park, near Great Slave Lake, some 2,500 miles away. This is six more than made the northbound trip last year.

One of the high spots of the whoopers this year is their total number--38, which includes six in captivity. This is the greatest number recorded since the United States Fish and Wildlife Service began making an annual census of the birds 20 years ago. The number of young which arrived in Aransas last fall--nine--was the highest on record. To this number was added another youngster in the New Orleans Zoo. Already in captivity were the well known pair, Crip and Josephine, and their two 1957 offspring and an adult at the zoo in San Antonio, Texas.

The disappointment in the past year was the fact that three of the whoopers which started north did not return to the wintering area.

Other highlights were sightings of whooping cranes far off the usual route on the Medicine Lake National Wildlife Refuge in eastern Montana, and near the Squaw Creek, Mingo (Missouri) and Mark Twain (Illinois) National Wildlife Refuge. The birds usually follow a more central route over the Prairie States. These sightings represented unusual eastern and western occurrence records for the birds during migration.

The spring migration back to the wilds of Canada started about three weeks ago when an aerial survey by the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife on April 3 indicated that 11 had departed. Since then the remaining cranes have commenced their traditional journey north by small groups at irregular intervals. The survey flight on April 27 disclosed that all birds had left the area.

Naturalists anticipate the return of the wild cranes to the Aransas Refuge on the Texas Gulf Coast next fall. It is hoped that the increase which was so evident in 1958 will mark a turn of fortune and the eventual restoration of the cranes from the threat of extinction.

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